



Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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State to recognize National Public Health Week with a series of stories

Day 2: April 3 — Reducing the impact of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs

ANCHORAGE — The Alaska Division of Public Health is recognizing National Public Health Week with a series of stories centered on the week's theme: A Healthier America Begins Today.

Each day, Monday through Friday, we will focus on a different aspect of health:

- Monday, April 2 — Obesity prevention through active living and healthy eating
- Tuesday, April 3 — Reducing the impact of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- Wednesday, April 4 — Preventing communicable diseases through immunization
- Thursday, April 5 — Preventing sexually transmitted diseases
- Friday, April 6 — Mental and emotional well-being

Sometimes the smallest change can make the biggest difference. Small changes in diet and exercise, tobacco use, immunization practices and sexual conduct can help people stay healthy. Yet each year, nearly 1 million Americans die from diseases that could have been prevented.

Despite substantial progress in reducing tobacco use, cigarette smoking continues to be the leading cause of death and disease in the United States and Alaska. A recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) analysis of the 2008 National Health Interview Survey found that the overall proportion of current adult smokers declined in the last decade. Even so, certain populations — especially those with less income and less education — continue to report an alarmingly high tobacco use rate and the lowest quit ratios.

Alaska has made significant progress in reducing cigarette smoking. There have been dramatic reductions in youth smoking rates, drops in adult smoking, and continued declines in tobacco consumption, providing further evidence that tobacco prevention and cessation programs work.

Despite the progress made, cigarette smoking remains a critical health issue in Alaska and disproportionately affects Alaska Native adults and youth, adults of lower socioeconomic status,

and younger adults (ages 18–29). Use of smokeless tobacco is also a concern, especially in rural areas and among Alaska Native adults and youth.

“Although there has been great success over the past decade, some of the hardest work remains ahead,” said Alexandria Hicks, Tobacco Control Program manager. “Early progress in reducing tobacco use can quickly be reversed by the social forces that tend to promote smoking. We need to maintain — and in some cases increase — our efforts to keep tobacco use from increasing in Alaska.”

Particularly in rural areas of Alaska, there is a need for more vigorous efforts to implement strategies that prevent kids from using tobacco, help those already addicted to quit, and protect everyone from secondhand smoke, Hicks said.

Secondhand smoke is a leading cause of preventable death in the United States, causing approximately 50,000 non-smoker deaths each year from heart disease and lung cancer. Even brief exposure can be harmful.

Nearly all (91 percent) of Alaska adults, including a majority of smokers (77 percent), agree that those who smoke should “take it outside” so that others do not have to breathe secondhand smoke. Ninety-two percent of Alaska adults have a policy of no smoking in their homes. Even the number of smokers reporting a completely smoke-free household policy has increased over the past decade from 48 to 79 percent.

“Quitting tobacco use can be hard, especially if you think about going ‘cold turkey,’” said Hicks. “We encourage people to find ways to break the habits built around smoking. First, make your home, car and workplace smoke free by taking smoking outside. Then, cut the number of cigarettes you smoke each day by half, and try to avoid situations that trigger your desire to smoke. Remember — it takes the average person 10 attempts before successfully quitting cigarettes for good, so if at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.”

Counseling support and nicotine replacement medications can significantly increase success rates. Tobacco users are urged to access help through the free services of the Alaska Tobacco Quit Line, 1-800-QUIT NOW.

For more tips and help in quitting tobacco go to the Alaska Quitline homepage at: <http://alaskaquitline.com/>

April 4 — Immunization

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